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THE
Commonweal
A Weekly Review of Public Affairs, Literature, and the Arts
THIRTY-FIFTH YEAR OF PUBLICATION

week by week

LACK OF PROGRESS REPORT

TWO YEARS AGO the Soviets launched the world's first man-made satellite, and America was swept by a shock wave of fear. In response, the President traveled about the country making speeches of assurance and determination. Administration leaders vowed sweeping reorganizations to step up our own neglected and mismanaged missile programs. Plans were drawn up for new centers of basic research and scientific training. Our entire educational system was judged and found wanting, and all sorts of drastic reforms were urged. It was a time of decision, everyone agreed, calling for purposeful action and all-out effort.

What has happened since then? The United States did manage to get the unhappily named, grapefruit-sized Vanguard into space, but only after a number of humiliating failures and a second dazzling Soviet success, this time with Sputnik II, a dog-carrying satellite weighing an unheard-of one thousand pounds. After this there were many U.S. successes in the foray into space (although not as many as there were failures), twelve satellites having been orbited by the U.S. as against three by the U.S.S.R. But the Soviets' continued superiority in the development of rocket fuels, engines and guidance systems has been made unquestionably clear by the extraordinary weights of their satellites and by the performance of these rockets in orbiting the sun, reaching the moon and, now, orbiting the moon.

As for the purposeful action and all-out effort in putting our own house in order, the clamor has died—and so, apparently, have all our massive plans. The research institutes and science centers which we so urgently needed two years ago are still nowhere to be seen; the nationwide scholarship system remains a pious hope; federal aid to education was as unpopular in Congress this year as it was before the space age.

THE BIG goal in our national life has turned out to be a balanced budget, not the solution of any of the problems that plague us either at home or abroad. The painful choice between "guns and butter"—or between military might and the domestic needs described as butter—has been unnecessary, it seems. The President's decision, applauded by most of the country, was to cut back on *everything*, guns, butter and all in between.

The weaknesses of our foreign policy, made grimly clear by recent crises off the coast of China, in Lebanon and Iraq, in Berlin, are still unacknowledged and unresolved. The West continues to be pressed by the Communists on every side—politically, militarily, psychologically, economically.

And what is the national temper? What is the response of the nation's leaders? Reactions in Washington to the Soviets' latest moon-shot are characteristically calm. The Soviet feat is given grudging recognition, with the amazing qualification that the U.S.S.R. has done nothing that we won't be able to do too, in a few years' time. It is pointed out that accuracy on a space journey of many thousands of miles is one thing, accuracy in hitting a target here on the earth is another.

The interest of the nation—citizens as well as officials—is obviously not in the unpleasant facts of the world situation but in the pleasant possibilities recently opened up by Mr. Khrushchev.

There is no question about the desirability of negotiation with the Soviets, no question about the need for peace. But surely negotiation with men who have sworn to destroy us, and who have the means of doing so, must proceed from a base of hard reality. No peace worth the name will be

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handed us either by a suddenly amiable Nikita Khrushchev or by a benevolent fate.

The apparent thaw in the cold war has not yet given us reason to relax, not while Soviet rockets soar through the heavens, while the island of Quemoy is pounded at will, while the people of West Berlin are forced to stare into the muzzle of an upraised Communist gun.

OUR NEW "COMPACTS"

THE USUAL FANFARE with which the nation's auto makers announce their new models has an unusual element this year. Ford, General Motors and Chrysler are proclaiming the virtues of a really new product, an economy-sized car. In some ways these new models of theirs represent a reversion to the past: an old-fashioned gearshift lever mounted on the floorboard is standard equipment, while wheelbase, horsepower and lack of chrome turn back the clock perhaps a dozen years. In other respects these new cars embody genuine engineering advances. (The General Motors Corvair, for example, is said to be the first American car with an engine in the rear and the first with its power plant made entirely of aluminum.)

Consumer enthusiasm for this latest product is somewhat dampened by a predicted price range which is very little below that of certain standard-size Ford, Chevrolet and Plymouth models. The bulk of the economy is therefore to come from greater mileage per gallon and the lower repair costs due to simplicity of design.

Since new car sales serve as an index to the state of national prosperity, many Americans appear genuinely interested in the extent to which the compact-car idea gets across. It has a number of initial advantages. Large numbers of the buying public can still be counted on to go for something largely because it is new. The "compacts" will provide an appealing answer to the critical urban parking problem. And as suburbs and new speculative housing developments stretch out in all directions on the American countryside—accompanied by a proliferation of scattered small industrial plants—getting to one's job by car often becomes mandatory. Indeed, new highways multiply, while rail lines and train schedules continue to dwindle. The new economy-sized car stands to benefit most as the number of American two-car families grows much beyond its present total of seven million.

It must be something like this of which the auto makers are thinking when they speak of an "expanded market." They do not admit that the new "compacts" will cut substantially into the sales of their larger standard lines, although the changes in their 1960 models are extensive enough to suggest that they are bracing themselves for the competitive impact. Some three decades after its heyday the Republican slogan about "two cars in every garage" is taking another stride toward fulfillment during the Eisenhower Administration, if for business—and sociological—rather than allegedly political reasons.

In conclusion, it is interesting to speculate how much American tastes are changing. Have we ceased to demand more power, more speed, more room, more shiny metal with each year's model in favor of efficiency, simplicity, compactness and economy? Has one's car actually yielded its place as the chief status symbol in the United States to one's house or neighborhood? If so, and the new economy-size models perform well, the nation's auto makers may have started something that will lead to a real swing in consumer demand. Something might even be made of the news that the highly symbolic Cadillac is itself coming out with much lower tail fins.

PETER A. KARL

It is with great sorrow and a deep sense of personal loss that we have to announce the death of Peter A. Karl, who died on Michaelmas Day at his home in Utica, N.Y., after an illness of several months. Peter Karl was a member of the Board of Directors of this magazine and President of the Commonweal Associates, but even these titles give an inadequate idea of the warmth and extent of his commitment to The Commonweal and to the idea behind it. He already had far more than his share of responsibilities when he first learned of this magazine's difficult financial situation several years ago—the export business he himself had founded, the normal concerns of a large family and an impressive series of civic and religious activities. Yet from then on he gave unstintingly of his time and great energies to the cause of The Commonweal, making the problems of this hard-pressed and understaffed lay journal his own. We will miss his wise counsel and unflagging enthusiasm; most of all, we will miss the man himself. May he rest in peace.

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MR. KHRUSHCHEV IN CHINA

IF THE MOST optimistic interpretation is put upon the Khrushchev-Mao meeting, it is still not heartening. Since the main business of the high-level Russian-Chinese meeting was not publicized, the rest of the world will know what agreements and disagreements took place only as it makes correct inferences during the coming months.

Mr. Khrushchev, almost as soon as he arrived in Peiping, made an address in which he emphasized the need to avoid war, and he had some kind expressions for the President of the United States. The public celebrations contained fewer expressions of hostility to the United States than is usual in China. But the reaction of the Chinese leaders to Mr. Khrushchev's address was not clear, and the note of "anti-imperialism" was struck often enough that no one was allowed to forget it.

If Russia and China now differ on the means by which they can oppose the West and extend their own power, it does not follow that they disagree about the goal toward which they strive. On the need to expand international Communism they must agree. As long as they do, one cannot regard either as a neutral country or even a dubious ally. They may differ with each other, but from the vantage point of the Western world the differences between these Communist countries are miniscule.

TAFT-HARTLEY IN STEEL

THANKS TO President Eisenhower's determined urging, the broken-off negotiations in the steel strike were resumed. At this writing, however, it is impossible to tell if any results will have been achieved when Mr. Eisenhower returns from his desert vacation. By the time this editorial appears, one of two things will probably have happened: the strike may be over, or, more likely, the President may have asked for an eighty-day injunction under the provisions of the Taft-Hartley Act. This interim waiting period, therefore, is a good time to consider the injunction feature of the law.

From the beginning, of course, labor unions have expressed their dislike for the Taft-Hartley law, often in exaggerated terms. Perhaps this stand led to an equally exaggerated reaction on the part of people who tend to be suspicious of labor unions; if the unions are against Taft-Hartley, they reason, it must be a good law. Such a non-rational approach has, we think, obscured what is a fact: there are bad features in our labor-management law, provisions that are not simply bad for unions but are bad for labor-management relations and for the nation as a whole.

One of these weak features is the injunction proceeding permitted to the President in case of national emergency. The President can ask for, and be almost certain of getting, an eighty-day injunction for "cooling off" purposes. At the end of that set period the workers vote in a secret election on the terms of the employer's "last" offer —a clause reflecting the belief of the law's framers that workers did not "really" support their leaders, a conviction that has since the law's passage been exploded in vote after vote. If the steelworkers in this instance vote to reject management's offer, the strike resumes, and the President has exhausted his powers, at least under Taft-Hartley.

The problem with all this is that the law is cut-and-dried; life and labor-management relations are not. There is no flexibility in the injunction provision, and in many cases the President is in fact circumscribed rather than helped by it, precisely because there are no alternative courses of action open to him. If either side—or both sides, for that matter—considers such a course advantageous, it can simply go through the motions of bargaining and wait for the eighty-day injunction. In an industry like steel, which produces all the steel needed while operating at far less than capacity, this may be a positive advantage for management. In other situations, the procedure may offer a comparable advantage to the union.

What is needed in the case of national emergency strikes are provisions that will give the President legal possibilities other than an eighty-day injunction. The law should give the White House some room to maneuver. For example, if the President could, instead of asking for an injunction, appoint a board of nationally known citizens to investigate and make positive recommendations, neither party would dare make only a pretense of bargaining in complete confidence that an eighty-day injunction was in the offing. Ultimately, of course, the solution to the steel strike or any other strike must depend on collective bargaining in good faith by the parties involved, but giving the President more ways to prod the reluctant into real bargaining would help matters.

When Taft-Hartley became law, one criticism made of it was that it was overly legalistic, and although the statement may sound paradoxical, events have indicated that there is considerable truth in it. Taft-Hartley was a broth in which too many of the cooks were lawyers and not enough

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were experts in labor-management relations, and it would be a better law with substantial revisions. At one time the Eisenhower Administration had plans to amend the Act, although not much has been heard along these lines lately, and that task should be taken up again. If current developments in the steel strike dramatize the weaknesses of the law enough to start the revision ball rolling, this will be at least one good result in an otherwise unhappy situation.

IN A BAD WAY

AMONG THE causes which enlisted the attention and passion of George Orwell was the improvement of the English language. To this cause he devoted one essay, "Politics and the English Language," which has lost little of its pertinence. For, without accepting the theory of language which underlies the essay, one can all too readily agree with many of his strictures. Although he directed his attention principally to the area of politics, the faults against which he inveighed flourish in most of the reading matter to which the average reader is exposed today.

One of his observations runs thus: "A man may take to drink because he feels himself to be a failure, and then fail all the more completely because he drinks. It is rather the same thing that is happening to the English language. It becomes ugly and inaccurate because our thoughts are foolish, but the slovenliness of our language makes it easier for us to have foolish thoughts."

Those comments seem particularly pertinent to some examples we encountered within a single day. The first: "Breeding in man or animal is a matter of developing and preserving certain characteristics through the generations. Such men or animals are high-bred. Where the purity of the strain has been broken, hybrid or mongrel results. There is an analogy in the styling of men's clothes."

The last sentence, of course, is the clue to the real interest. This is an effort on the part of a well-known men's store to sell suits. But the opening sentences sound as if they could have come from a Brave New World. It is difficult to believe that the advertising writer had a racial theory in mind. It is more likely that he simply did not think about what he was writing. And the result is foolish if not, indeed, ugly.

The other choice bit came in an advertisement from a book publisher. The publisher can not be held wholly responsible, for he is merely quoting Norman Vincent Peale's definition of Christianity. "Christianity," wrote Dr. Peale, "is a mechanism designed to transmit power from Jesus Christ to the individual. It teaches techniques for obtaining that inner peace from which power comes." After reading this at least one reader feels that he would have to be an engineer in order to discuss Christianity with Dr. Peale. But of course this mechanical application of mechanical terms to questions of religion has little if anything to do with Christianity. Again, the vocabulary and the analogy have distorted, and almost entirely destroyed, the concepts they were intended to convey.

These are only two among many possible examples which lead us to conclude with the sentiment with which George Orwell began his essay: "Most people who bother with the matter at all would admit that the English language is in a bad way. . . ."

THE COMMITTEE AND THE TIGER

THE ADMINISTRATION committee on inflation headed by Vice President Nixon has a long name—to wit, the President's Cabinet Committee on Price Stability for Economic Growth. Recently this body completed a long backward look at prices—two hundred and forty years long, in fact—and has now issued a report on the subject.

In one sense, the committee said, there is nothing new about price rises. It found that prices have been going up an average of 0.5 per cent a year for the entire period of just under two and one-half centuries. Nonetheless, the price pattern in our own particular period of history is distinctive. Sharp peaks in price levels are all associated with war years, when prices have risen much faster than in peace. But in the past, prices always went down again within a decade or two after the war; the distinctive thing about this quarter of a century is that prices never went down again. Thus today's prices are double what they were twenty-five years ago, although prices then were only double what they had been two hundred years ago.

In short, prices go up, and they never come down. Why? For the answer to this good question the country will have to wait for the Committee's next report. But, as in the famous recipe for tiger stew, the committee has made a beginning; it has caught the politically dangerous tiger—at least by the tail. It will be interesting to see what the Committee does with it.

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Theology and Literature

In the renewed dialogue between literature and theology, it is the latter, perhaps, which stands to profit most

by BERNARD G. MURCHLAND

THE RELATIONSHIP between belief and literature is complex. Although it is one of long standing, the search for a religious dimension in literature has assumed rather startling proportions in our own day. The difficulties attendant upon this search are first of all those of definition. How are literature and theology to be defined so that each remains autonomous and yet inter-related? What common ground must be assigned to each and where are the differentiating limits to be set?

Attempts to establish the relationship between belief and literature usually lead to one of two inadequate solutions. On the one hand, the believer approaches literature with a more or less full-bodied set of theological definitions and doctrines that amounts to a prejudice. He tends to find in a given literary work an illustration of his own beliefs and sorts out those aspects of the work most suitable to substantiate his view. He rejects as esthetically unfit, as "bad art," anything that expresses a testament to experience that is contrary to his own. He may disguise his reaction very subtly but it is not for that less disastrous.

This is a form of romantic idealism that is much more alive today than is sometimes supposed. It is represented, for example, by a Charles Du Bos who wrestled with this problem at some length and in the end saw literature as the meeting place of two souls. This view, to say the least, begs as many important questions as does that of the "prophet" school of critics who hail the best literary artists of our century as latter-day prophets clothing the bones of existence with meaningful and ultimate "answers."

A second inadequate solution is to define culture in terms of religion and then to confuse the two. Karl Shapiro accuses, and I think with some justice, T. S. Eliot of being at the root of much of this confusion. A cardinal point of Eliot's poetic vision is this: "The dominant force in creating a common culture between people each of which has its distinct culture is religion." Culture, as Shapiro analyzes this dictum, is supposedly derived from religion. But the kind of culture Eliot seems to have in mind is larger than religion and tends to become a surrogate for it. Thus when culture becomes the chief business of the poet it becomes in fact his religion, a religion in which no mention of God is necessary, except in extremely general terms, or no vital awareness of His presence required. It is understandable that many look upon any attempt to wed religion and art with cool suspicion and even prefer to deny the possibility of any such wedding.

SUCH A DENIAL, however, is not legitimate. There are no respectable grounds for ignoring the questions: what is literature's relationship to theology? and how does theology inform a valid esthetic? No less a figure than Gabriel Marcel speaks of this relationship in deep, ontological terms. In one amazing statement he affirms this: "I am inclined to believe that it is by beginning with works of art that life must be interpreted—and I am not speaking of life as a natural phenomenon but of *our* life attained in its mystery and intimacy." And speaking more specifically of literature: "I have no hesitation in saying that it is through the novelist's power of creation that we can get our best glimpse of what lies behind and under the reverberatory power of facts."

In a very sympathetic, informed and frequently penetrating book, *Theology and Modern Literature,* (Harvard. $3.) Amos N. Wilder manifests an awareness of the ambiguities that beset an inquiry into this subject. He holds forth no answer as to the precise nature of the relationship between literature and theology. But his analysis inclines somewhat toward a Marcellian estimation of the esthetic. "A great deal

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of the most significant art of this century has had striking theological implications," he asserts at the outset. And he goes on:

"The life of the artist offers many analogies to the life of faith. The strictness of his way of life, the combination of ascesis and joy, the law of incarnation which limits all false spirituality, such features of the artist's calling carry both rebuke and instruction for the Christian, especially in a time when indulgence and unreality have infected the practice of religion. In today's cultural disarray, moreover, the modern literary artist in particular has much to teach us bearing on the rediscovery of meaning, the sifting of traditions, the discernment of spirits, and the renewal of the word. . . . Our elaboration of a new grammar and rhetoric of faith and apologetic can learn much from the new discourse of the poets."

Mr. Wilder itemizes in detail the signs of "renewed conversation" between Christianity and the arts. He assesses modern literature as a protest against a false religion that is no doubt historically the result of a failure of high-level theology. One cannot but agree that "the deeper moral and spiritual issues of man today are often more powerfully canvassed" by writers than by theologians or churchmen and that "the modern writer challenges men to revise their mood and attitude. He says that cherished decorums are misconceived, and that cherished securities are not enough. That which is made so much of as 'health' and 'sanity' in accepted attitudes is incriminated as sickness."

THE METAMORPHOSIS of so much modern literature into religious terms must in the first instance be interpreted as a strenuous criticism of religion itself. It asserts that when theology turns away from meaning to dissect "natures," "properties," and "objects" it cannot for long claim the allegiances of men. It is always dangerous to speak of the irrational as functional in Christian theology; but it is certain that an over-refined rationalism has led us to a regrettable impasse. Abstraction in itself is always an impoverishment of reality. *Faute de mieux,* much of modern literature *is* a creative embodiment of biblical truths and to this extent the "prophet" critics are right. A long line of unbelievers have been in possession of words of life and have entered the kingdom while the church-affiliated have stood outside crying Lord, Lord! By discerning the sensibility of their times the artist has taken on burdens and responsibilities that theologians have either not recognized or have rejected.

Obviously this line of reasoning can be carried too far. The Christian should never ultimately confuse his own role with another's. Yet he must be open-minded enough, even humble enough, to explore, in Wilder's terms, the "news of reality" that emanates from other quarters. This much modern literature can certainly tell the theologian: religion can be meaningful only through a constantly renewed awareness and a creative re-working of its own revealed data in terms of man's subjectivity, his self-consciousness, his role as responsible agent in the world; of man in search of his own identity; of a creature who subjects to criticism the conditions of his existence and his belief.

Yet the didactic overtones of this assessment might prevent us from seeing a deeper relationship between literature and theology. The esthetic imagination is an important clue to reality. It reveals the essentially symbolic character of man's thought and expression. It was originally Vico who documented this theory. In search of an adequate philosophy of man, Vico undertook to explore the nature of historical processes. As he descended into the origins of human expression, into the *ingens sylva* of the human past, he was struck by the fact that the earliest documents were, almost without exception, poetic in expression.

Thus Vico formulated this axiom: "The first nations thought in poetic characters, spoke in fables and wrote in hieroglyphics." This cannot be attributed to a deficiency of the primitive mind. Vico was careful to insist upon the profound, ontological structure of this poetic activity. It is ontological because, he said, it is an act by which the human spirit generates or creates its own meaning. Thought, in the Viconian sense, is not an abstractive process; it is an integral movement in virtue of which mind generates its own presence to itself, and in that presence, its whole being as spirit.

When this intimately poetic character of human consciousness is admitted, it follows that every expression of that consciousness will bear the same quality. That is to say, it will express itself symbolically. This is strikingly the case in early theological expressions. Genesis is perhaps the obvious example of this in the Judeo-Christian tradition. But Revelation was rather consistently given in symbolic forms.

As a matter of fact, we must note that man's earliest expressions were theological as well as symbolic. The coincidence of theological perception and symbolic articulation conveys a truth that is not only directly relevant to our discussion but, more broadly, is of great importance in understanding the direction of modern man's most serious intellectual efforts.

LET US ELABORATE upon that truth. Literature, as a privileged mode of symbolic expression, was constantly at work tilling the soil of theological reflection. A religious view of the world was intrinsically enunciated in that mode. Early theological efforts, from one point of view, projected the

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fundamental orientation of esthetic insight upon a larger screen and added the specific dimension of transcendence. From a deeper point of view, theology was the very basis of symbolic expression because it was the revelation of the tragic. The vital bond between the symbolic processes of the mind and the tragic brings us close to the heart of the matter at hand. The witness of the primitive consciousness is here indispensable.

This consciousness pondered the redoubtable and dolorous mysteries of life: the fact of death, the enmity of the elements, the pain of love and childbirth, the sombre symbolism of nature. As it did so it posed the ultimate religious question: Why? How did man's lot fit into a more meaningful scheme? Life confronted men primarily in tragic terms, in terms of extremes and antinomies.

Upon this awareness early man devised suitable myths to justify his own existence and release the deepest reality of himself. He spontaneously accepted the symbol as the most adequate means at the disposal of the human spirit for coping with a tragic situation. He perceived symbolization as a process by which higher, hidden, mysterious levels of reality are evoked and attained by means of intermediary levels. In virtue of the symbol the esthetic imagination connected human experience to a larger, more meaningful reality.

In the Judeo-Christian dispensation this heritage was more sharply focused toward a personal God; but the tragic vision of life was not attenuated nor was the symbolic structure of human consciousness tampered with. Biblical literature, and indeed all great literature, respected these two fundamental facts about man.

It is not the place here to wonder why this has not been more effectively understood in Western civilization. Today there do seem to be grounds for the hope that the divorce between Christianity and the arts might be overcome. Wilder rightly suggests that a new level of dialogue is possible because both Christianity and the arts have been "affected and deepened" by the crises of our age. Today both religion and art reveal themselves in their best expressions under the aspect of tragedy. It is perhaps the greatest weakness of Wilder's book that he did not pursue this insight further. For it is, I believe, in the notion of tragedy that the final relationship between literature and theology is to be sought.

THE POSSIBILITY of a Christian tragedy is a subject likely to raise lively controversy. But if we define the basis of tragedy in a broad way as a distention in man, then in Christian terms of reference tragedy is not only possible but the very notion is given new and compelling depth. Christianity reveals first and foremost that the essential structure of the human spirit is its finitude, its orientation towards the infinite and the tension which attends this character, the tragedy incorporated in the passage from one pole to another. This is the most radical distention possible. The finite-infinite dichotomy in man is the primary instance of the tragic; it is the matrix within which symbolic expression becomes possible; and it is, further, the root norm by which symbolic expression is directed.

It may be said that it is literature's distinctive function to safeguard the symbolic structure of human consciousness and consistently reconnoiter new and valid ways for that consciousness to relate itself to the meaningful. In so doing, and informed by theology's revelation of the tragic and the ultimately meaningful, literature performs most creditably.

It would, of course, be an oversimplification to distinguish literature and theology exclusively in terms of the symbolic and the tragic. The two notions are too intrinsically related to permit of any such facile juxtapositing. Literature, too, is a revelation of the tragic. And theology cannot disrespect the symbolic structure of man's mind in its own expressions. It is rather here a question of emphasis and method. Each must work for the transformation of the world. The Christian, whether as artist or theologian, accepts the world as a given which man must reflectively and interiorly reshape and intensify.

Much of the theology of the West, unfortunately, has been ill at ease with both symbolic expression and the tragic. It has frequently opted for an abstractive mode of expression and confronted the tragic only indirectly through some form of pietism or other. We might say that this is especially true of a long-standing tradition of Catholic theology. Father Yves Congar has been one persistent critic of the shortcomings of this tradition. Theology, he says, operates neither in a physical nor a metaphysical order but rather in the positive order of Christian revelation which is an expression—and largely a symbolic expression—of a free act of God.

At this level it is impossible to affirm anything unless it be *within* the order of mystery. And at the heart of this mystery stands the Cross as a direct consequence of the Incarnation. It is much more accurate to speak of the Cross as a meaningful reality than as a symbol. For it says all that can be said about the tragic condition of man. It is the point of mediation at which the finite-infinite dichotomy in man encounters hope. If theology is to inform a proper Christian esthetic (in the strict sense of the word) it will inform this esthetic most deeply, I believe, in terms of this mystery.

In this respect I find Dr. Wilder's remarks about the doctrine of transubstantiation rather curious. "The

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Mass," he says, "is the key to a Catholic art. It defines the relation of grace to nature, and the relations of the Catholic artist to the world. But this standpoint, in effect, disparages any 'secular' art, in the good sense of that term. All art becomes 'sacred art'. . . . The doctrine of transubstantiation presupposes a very special metaphysic, a radical dualism between nature and the supernatural. The natural level, our human life, has no encounter with grace unless it is taken up into a massive sacral order which is essentially miraculous." This biting observation raises a real problem. Significant empirical evidence of Wilder's point is the fact that many Catholic artists have been persuasively charged with practicing one form of religious disloyalty or another in order to remain faithful to their art.

ONE MUST agree that this kind of case against "sacramentalism" seems to have much to support it. The Mass may be admitted as a key to Catholic art if it is added that it is through the Mass that the Catholic can most clearly see man under the aspect of the tragic, in his finite-infinite dichotomy. But as a direct corollary of the Incarnation it could hardly argue in favor of a "radical dualism." It is only the worst kind of theology that could give the impression that it "presupposes a very special metaphysics." Theology, as Father Congar says, does not operate in a metaphysical order. This is not to deny that metaphysics, in its scientific character, can be extremely useful in clarifying the Christian mystery. But it is to deny that metaphysical postulates are capable of governing and enclosing what relates to God's revelation.

It is evident that much bad metaphysics has crept into theology and it is difficult to eradicate. But it is still more evident that the whole basis of this theology cautions against both evasion and bad philosophy and, on the contrary, urges in favor of a transformation of all reality to the highest possible measure of meaning.

The Mass, however inadequate explanations of it may be, clearly situates the mystery of man: his finitude, his orientation towards the infinite and the tragic nature of this mystery. Further it maintains the vitality of that mystery across history. Insofar as theologians have failed to make this clear it is their fault and not that of their discipline. Any Christian theology that does not carry with it "the emancipation of human vitality and personal richness" and "rule out idolatry, pagan mysticism and magic" is deficient, and one does not have to adopt a partisan religious position to reject it.

As the record stands it would seem that it has been primarily the literary artist who has nourished men's inward lives in this century. Consequently, in the renewed dialogue between literature and theology perhaps the latter stands to profit most. But, if this is the case, we must look upon such a situation as a temporary devitalization of theology. We would seriously compromise the nature of the human mystery if we were to give literature the final word. For the truth of the matter is that the theologian's vision of the meaningful is greater.

Whatever else the theologian must do he must work towards rendering a life of grace available to man, he must direct man along the avenues of transcendent participation and communion and lead him to a sharing in the life of a living God. This literature cannot do; but to that end the testimony of literature is indispensable.

ISAIAH'S COAL

What More Can Man Desire?

Always, he woke in those days
With a sense of treasure,
His heart a gayer glow
Than his window grand with sun,
As a child, its mind all whirring
With green and hollied pleasure
Wakes in a haze of *Christmas!*
The season of secrets done.

Or as one on country linen
Wakes with a start one morning—
Then on comfort snugger than pillows
Floats: July at the lake.
Or has married a golden girl
And can hardly believe, but turning
Sees blossom for him that very face
Worshipping cameras take.

Toy trains whirr perky on
Till springs contort beneath;
The middle-age rower slumps
Like a sack—indignant seizure!
Late editions wail
Screen Star in Mystery Death—
Yet in those same days
He woke with a sense of treasure.

Knowing: my love is safe
Though the Rockies plunge like water,
Though surf like a wildfire rage
And omens roam the sky;
Though limbs of the swimmer laze
Pale where the seaweed caught her,
Nothing can touch my love
As dangerous time goes by.

JOHN FREDERICK NIMS.

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ARRIVEDERCI, ROMA

EACH TIME I have left this city, *the* City, eternally urban, eternally beckoning, it has been with the solemn resolve to return. But it would be foolish to take unnecessary chances. So one afternoon I took the family to the Trevi fountain and we ceremoniously threw pennies over our shoulders. And now as we leave we are all convinced that we will return—but probably never again *en famille*.

Nevertheless I have achieved a fatherly ambition. I have introduced the children to the ancient home of their culture and of their faith. Long after I am gone, I hope that they will remember their stay here, and when they do come back will recall the day they stood by the fountain with their parents and tossed pennies into the waters. But they will have other things to remember, too.

I do not think they will quickly forget their audience with Pope John XXIII. There was great excitement in our household when the Vatican messenger arrived one afternoon with the announcement that the Holy Father would receive us next morning at Castel Gandolfo. We got up early, the children were all scrubbed and shining, and we went off to the railroad station to get the interurban train to the Pope's summer residence. Through a mixup, Terence, the oldest, missed the train. We waited anxiously until the last minute, but the train left without him. Everyone was sad about it, though it was solemnly agreed that at least he would learn a lesson from the disappointment.

After we got to the tiny railroad station at Castel Gandolfo, there was an interminable climb up the hill to the Pontifical Palace. When finally we reached the palace, our stalwart Terence was awaiting us. The younger children cheered. Admiration for their big brother shone in their eyes. A mishap that was going to teach him a lesson only established his adolescent independence more solidly. They knew he did not have any money of his own. How did he do it? Simple. He explained his plight to a Roman cab driver who agreed that the only thing to do was to drive him out there. I would like to report that the cab driver, his work of mercy completed, quietly disappeared. But he was waiting with a bill.

The Pope, as warmly human and fatherly as we expected him to be, asked if they were all ours. When we said yes he clapped his hands, "Bravo, Bravissimo." He gave individual attention to each one. He told Joan that she and he had the same name; he told Ann that her name meant Grace; he found the Italian form for Terence, etc. He said that maybe one of the boys would be a priest, adding "Who knows?" when not one of the four announced a vocation on the spot. In the confusion Christopher never got a chance to kiss the Fisherman's ring, but Monsignor Ryan, the Pope's secretary noted his disappointment, and after the Pope finished with the others in the room he led the Holy Father back to Chris. All received the papal blessing and Pope John smilingly left us. The children were elated with their good fortune when we climbed down the steep hill to get the train back to Rome.

Though this was the high point of the trip, there were other things for them to remember. There was the day Chris found some old coins buried under a rock in the Coliseum and was sure he had uncovered priceless relics. On closer inspection, the coins turned out to be French francs from the Occupation and generally worthless. But this aroused a numismatic enthusiasm that ultimately led him to the Roman flea market where he purchased a whole handful of misshapen coins, supposedly antique, for a few lire.

Both girls were horrified by the Capuchin cemetery on the Via Veneto where the skeletal remains of dead friars are piled up in what the guide books straightfacedly describe as artistic patterns. But the boys were intrigued by it all. They all even began to get interested in churches, or at least in counting up the number they visited, which was considerable, and they trudged dutifully if somewhat hastily through the Vatican Museum and stood goggle-eyed before the wonders of the Vatican Treasury.

I can not really say what they got out of the trip. I suppose that its value was rather cumulative and that it will be some time before we know what was learned. Perhaps considerably less than I hoped for. For one thing is sure. Rome puts demands on its visitors. One must be steeped in history, art, architecture, even theology, to get what Rome has to give.

But I hope that this first trip to Rome will serve as an introduction to many things for our children. Most of all, I hope that we have all come home a little more tolerant of other people's customs and ways than we were when we left. I hope we have all gained a deeper sense of history, which is something else again from mere knowledge of historical events. I hope that we have a larger view of Catholicism and a keener appreciation of the variety of humanity who for religious reasons alone feel at home in the Eternal City.

Though we will all be glad to get back to the familiarity of our own land, the wonder of Rome is also a little familiar now, too. There is a sense in which we are all Romans, for it is here in this city that the West has its most venerable home. *Arrivederci, Roma.*

JOHN COGLEY.

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The uniqueness of American experience is reflected in our literature

The American Pattern

by SAM HYNES

IT HAS BEEN nearly two hundred years now since Crèvecoeur asked "What is an American?" and offered his own answer. There have been many other answers since then, but the question, and the need for new answers, remains. Now more than ever, perhaps, the question demands an answer; but now, as always, the complexity of the American experience resists final formulation.

One assumption, however, all answers are likely to to share. Writers on America, from Crèvecoeur to Max Lerner, agree that there is something unique about America and the experience of being an American, something reflected in our manners, our institutions, our literature: few Europeans, and no Americans, have seriously argued that America is not a distinct civilization, radically different from its European roots.

The basis of this assumption was stated most clearly a century ago by a Polish visitor named Adam Gurowski. In his book *America and Europe* Gurowski wrote that America was different because "the historical process of formation" was different: "A principle begot the American society; force and conquest were the parents of the ancient one." And he went on to argue that our peculiar virtue lay in this fact, that "the American world was not called to life, and is not circumscribed by the narrow, blind, fatalistic physical laws of race . . . . To initiate man into a higher sphere, America issued out of nothingness."

To most of us Gurowski's version of America must seem extravagantly idealistic and over-simplified, perhaps even a bit embarrassing. Nevertheless, what he said is important, for he was expressing an idea of America which has been almost universally accepted from the beginnings of our nation, and which remains, consciously or unconsciously, a basis for our actions and judgments as Americans, and for judgments of us by the rest of the world.

"A *principle* begot the American society": it is in this traditional association of America and principle that a considerable part of our national identity is to be found. We find it in the strain of didacticism that runs through the work of our major writers, as well as in the high-minded inflexibility of diplomats like the late Mr. Dulles. We find it in verse at the foot of the Statue of Liberty, and in prose on the Lincoln Memorial. We assume, whether we think about it or not, that America has a special commitment to idealism, and because we assume it, we are different.

THE CONSEQUENCES of this assumption are vast: the most serious is that by accepting it we isolate America morally from the rest of the world, and subject our actions as a nation to a special, severe kind of moral judgment. As a nation we are committed to a forward-moving liberal progressivism which is inevitably pragmatic; yet we judge action against those great democratic abstractions which we assume to be at the foundation of American life. As a consequence, the inevitable failures and corruptions of men seem particularly reprehensible falls from grace; our leaders disappoint us by being politicians, our novelists fail to write the Great American Novel, our businessmen reveal an unseemly acquisitiveness. We are caught in the dreamer's dilemma, between the ideal and the actual.

The more perceptive observers of America have noted this radical dilemma in our national composition, and have recognized that tensions, unresolved and unresolvable conflicts between opposed convictions, are at the heart of our national identity. The conflicts have been set up in various ways—in political terms (radicalism vs. conservatism), in cultural terms (Europe and the traditional past vs. the frontier and the future), in economic terms (laissez-faire acquisitiveness vs. natural liberality), and even in esthetic terms (traditional ideas of form vs. freedom from formal restraints). Each opposition is an absolute one, and on the horns of these many dilemmas America as a civilization hangs.

I think it was D. H. Lawrence who first applied this view of America-as-conflict to the study of our literature. His *Studies in Classic American Literature* was the first book by a European to take American writers seriously, and it remains one of the most provocative and profound answers to Crèvecoeur's question. Lawrence recognized what no previous critic of America

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had (though it seems obvious enough)—that the tensions of our national life are reflected in our national literature. He recognized also, as Gurowski had not, the expense in human terms involved in the effort to separate a new country from its past, to build upon principles without traditions. He likened the making of America to the sloughing off of an old skin; the true American "writhes like a snake that is long in sloughing." The American experience, he realized, is a traumatic one, and that trauma is revealed in the violence, the conflicts, the symbolic complexity of our "classical" literature.

LAWRENCE'S view of American literature has become the standard one; the extent of his influence is evident if we look at three recent studies of the American novel. All are concerned to develop a theory of American literary development, and all start with the assumption that the key to an understanding of that development lies in the recognition of unresolved conflicts in American experience.

Marius Bewley's *The Eccentric Design* (Columbia. $4.) is sub-titled "Form in the Classic American Novel." The matrix of that form he finds in the American commitment to "the great American democratic abstractions"—to *principle*. "There was that in the American ethos," he writes, "which gave an emotional primacy to ideas, which made them the proper subject-matter of the novelist's art, while at the same time the novelist was deprived of that richness of nuance and tone which a traditional society alone can provide." Faced with this situation, the artist did the only thing he could do: he turned away from social themes, the traditional subject matter of the European novel, to metaphysical themes; he substituted symbolic density for the social density which America lacked.

There is nothing in his analysis that one could quarrel with. But when Mr. Bewley goes in search of the roots of the American conflict, he begins to simplify. "At bottom," he says, "the tension is political in character," and he draws upon the writings of Jefferson, Hamilton and Adams to support his case. This works well enough when Mr. Bewley is examining the political writings of the Founding Fathers, but less well when he goes on "to show the way in which these tensions, basically political in nature, enter into the fabric of American fiction." His pursuit of his thesis leads him to choose for analysis minor writings of his writers which "touch the argument" conveniently, and virtually to ignore major works; in some instances, as in his treatment of Melville, he is forced to drag in the thesis by the hair.

The point is simply that he has taken the symptom for the disease; the political tension in American thought is an aspect of a more fundamental, more complex tension, and cannot be used to explain the "eccentric design" in American writing as a whole. Nevertheless, there is much in Mr. Bewley's book that is of value; he has gone beneath subject matter to questions of values for his definitions, and if his book does not give us a total view of the American writer's heritage, it does offer one aspect which is genuine and worth noting.

RICHARD CHASE calls the first section of his book, *The American Novel and its Tradition*, (Anchor. $.95.) "A Culture of Contradictions," a title which seems to place him with Bewley and Lawrence in finding unresolved conflict at the root of American experience. Like Mr. Bewley he is concerned with the form which American fiction has taken, and the relation of that form to the American intellectual tradition, but his understanding of the nature of that tradition differs from Mr. Bewley's. He begins with the observation that "many of the best American novels achieve their very being, their energy and their form, from the perception and acceptance not of unities but of radical disunities," but he does not attempt to isolate a single kind of disunity as central.

Chase takes from Hawthorne the distinction between "romance" and "novel," using the former term to distinguish the characteristic American novel, the novel of "contradictions." The romance Mr. Chase regards as a "native tradition," but once past Hawthorne in his chronological survey of American novels he finds it more and more difficult to assert that any novel is entirely a romance, and is driven to qualifications of his terms which in the end considerably reduce their value. Yet on the whole this excellent book succeeds in defining the American experience in classic fiction without over-simplification or distortion.

The two main sources of American romance, Mr. Chase writes, are "pastoral nostalgia and the moral melodrama." It is the pastoral nostalgia on which Wright Morris focuses his attention in *The Territory Ahead* (Harcourt, Brace. $4.50.). Like the other critics I have discussed, Mr. Morris sees conflict and tension at the center of American experience, conflict which leads us to "such notably schizoid lives." "Our writers of genius," he observes, "face backward while their countrymen march resolutely forward." Nostalgia, the yearning backward toward a lost republican innocence, has crippled the American imagination, turning it away from the present toward a dream of the past, to a hut by a pond, or a raft on a river.

Being a novelist, Mr. Morris is less concerned with the past of our literature than with its future; his book is a diagnosis of the "climate of failure" in which he finds American writing at the present moment. This is one of its principal values. Not many American

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writers—perhaps only Henry James—have had the critical capacities for such an examination of their own relation to their inheritance as Americans. *The Territory Ahead* is a book of institutions rather than of analyses, of personal responses to the shaping power of American writers, and to their failures.

Mr. Morris' main charge against American writers is that, in their nostalgic yearning for the mythic past, they have become entranced with their raw materials, with the poetry of things. "The mere sight of things, a listing of their uses, excites in the American a rudimentary esthetic. It is not uniquely American, but as Americans we rely on it almost uniquely. After all, what *else* is there? Objects and places are the only things we have, and they bear such *mystique* meaning as we have to give out." The expense of this fascination has been the depreciation of intelligence, and the failure to develop technically. Mr. Morris cites as example Walt Whitman, "the forerunner of those anonymous classics the Sears, Roebuck and Montgomery Ward catalogues." Things, *American* things, carry the emotional weight of our own sense of our Americanness: "In the *beginning*—our men of genius go on saying—this is how it was. . . ."

CLEARLY, what Mr. Chase sees as the American tradition, and Mr. Bewley as the "eccentric design," Mr. Morris sees as the American failure. The unresolved conflict between principle and action, between the American dream and the American reality, cannot nourish American writing any longer. If the American writer is to develop, he must find the "territory ahead" in his own experience, in his own imagination.

Through these three books, for all their differences, there runs, as I have said, one common strand—the assumption that the American experience is an experience of tensions. Whether we choose to call those tensions, as they appear in our writing, *romance* or *nostalgia* depends on whether we choose to be descriptive or critical; but in any case, they exist. Mr. Morris may be right in urging American writers to create their own brave new worlds; but I am inclined to doubt it. The dream of the new start is a profoundly American one, but it is scarcely an achievable one now, if it ever was. There is no West to escape to, no wilderness to disappear into; there is only the present. But nostalgia, the dream, *principle* are as much a part of our present as today's newspapers and the new-model automobiles. The conflict of ideals and reality is the American Original Sin, and there is no use trying to disown it.

All three critics quote, as the highest expression of the American dream, the wonderful closing passage of *The Great Gatsby,* in which Nick stands on the Long Island shore, and thinks of his country's past:

"And as the moon rose higher the inessential houses began to melt away until gradually I became aware of the old island here, that flowered once for Dutch sailors' eyes—a fresh, green breast of the new world. Its vanished trees, the trees that had once made way for Gatsby's house, had once pandered in whispers to the last and greatest of all human dreams; for a transistory enchanted moment man must have held his breath in the presence of this continent, compelled into an aesthetic contemplation he neither understood nor desired, face to face for the last time in history with something commensurate to his capacity for wonder."

This is, to be sure, romantic; it is nostalgic. But it is also a radical part of our national inheritance. Our greatest writers have recognized it, and realized it in their work; it is a necessary term in the complex of tensions which is America.

Reading Dante With Ionians

We did him boys, with no care,
mucking through all that light
with our boots unlaced, right
into the face of God. We learned
the rhetoric of hell
and watched the celestial
flower wagon standing in the sun.

O my boys. All those things:
the sweet style of the world and
the unmaking of the mind; the land
of milk and honey, of roaring
kennels and lovers come to love
like cranes hovering above
a burning barn, pushed from nests

into the kinetic blasts; the land
lying like a pulley between heaven
and hell, the leaven
of the sun and the racket of seraph.
We cannot tell how much we said,
how near we got to the head
and husk of the sanctified, but we

tried, O boys how we did try and never,
no matter if we're priest
or sybarite, husband or the least
dandy in the world's garden will we know
again the bowl of heaven where the flow
and stammer of the Lord pitched
on the mind, how from this poem we learned

the possibilities of praise.

NED O'GORMAN.

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THE LANGUAGE OF NEW YORK

A PERSON who once lived in New York City a long time and then moved far away finds his visits back to town more interesting every additional year he is an outlander. The whole country, probably, is too much like it, but New York acts as the capital, amplifying manners and interests to the verge of burlesques and reflecting them back again over the nation so that hardly a village in the land is culturally underprivileged, or culturally safe. The dominant manners and morals and concerns develop there an amplitude beyond the reproductive powers of all the lesser centers. New York, now, at least for America, seems to be almost the absolute city. Differences in the degree of urbanization of other towns beyond its pale seem unimportant. For metropolitan city life during these decades, if a person does not live in New York, it doesn't much matter where he lives.

Factories and mills and plants of enormous variety within the New York region create, we are told, a tremendous product of manufactured goods. Shipping in and out and around the center reaches a huge magnitude. Nearly all phases of the economy flourish there at the highest statistical levels. But New York does not stand upon this ordinary economic groundwork, and the character of the center and apex, Manhattan, is built on another foundation. Here, undoubtedly, is the administrative center. It is the focus of auctioning and bargaining; the principal clearing house for executives, professionals, technicians and the promising young. New York is the dominant market for ideas, plans and projects; the most powerful generator of supply and demand for science, technology and art. It is the headquarters of paper work. Symbolically, and quite realistically, New York is built on words, and its special function is to handle the language.

What awe ought we have of the great City? It would be lumpish not to react to the traffic itself and to the constantly growing ranks of towering, glassed-in, superstructures. But the Manhattan cultivation marks the people and the society even more strikingly than the geography. The visitor feels quite sure that he sees, or senses, a particular pattern of manners which is perhaps quite temporary, shifting and passing away with brief fashions, but nevertheless organized, as it were: objective, purposeful and formalized with rituals and ways of speech. Most social critics protest against the portrait and ideal which New York appears to dramatize. We all know the standard diatribe against the whole thing. Much that is synthetic, meretricious and affected, much that is pathetic and cruel is found throughout the fabric of the smart and metropolitan life.

It cannot be denied, but still, the case is more complex than the satirists usually admit. There remains a necessary argument for some sort of deliberate human cultivation. In a strange, paradoxical and libertine way, the City does work to supply initiative, discipline and order. Perhaps a solution to the problem of New York may be approached most simply by avoiding the products and foibles advertised in the *New Yorker,* and by considering as detachedly as possible the cultivation of words and language. New Yorkers make a great point of knowing what everybody else is talking about, and all their talk is held together by the same fund of words and phrases and reference points. The different circles, with their evidently different fields of interest, all seem to operate under the same pressure of the flowing municipal language. Its pressure enforces a certain grammar and logic, rhetoric and communicability. These are necessary, difficult elements for any style and culture, good or bad. New York may be good or bad, but it is definitely something.

A contemporary Horace, or brothers Fowler, might have a very bad time indeed with some of the matchless literature attributed to Madison Avenue, or with the jungelese of modern business and government prose. These seem to be deliberate perversions, a sort of play—diabolical perhaps—in sectors of the Manhattan word industry. They presuppose no little practice and mastery of legitimate language. The books, papers and magazines, radio and TV, the executive orders and inter-office memorandums, the speeches and lectures. theses and sermons, the invitations and refusals, the jokes and insults all go together with the entire way of New York. A sharp, intense and aspiring life, personal and social, is needed to maintain a living language. There must be energetic desire, and identifiable fashion and style, even if it is only stylish and fashionable. In some measure and manner, this may be a beginning of an apology for Manhattan Island. All that manner and mode which one sees again on returning—the very buildings themselves, clear and slick with all the contrivance of esoteric art and practical science, provide a background and expression for a cultural pattern. Exuberantly the City works for a form which can be put into building and manners and language, into things for sale, political platforms, and into stories to tell. An excessive articulateness is cultivated in all the serious and frivolous arts and crafts and sciences. New York (the visitor hopes) may not *be* American culture, but it would be almost impossible to throw it out of the Union without throwing away a large portion of our culture's stimulus.

PHILIP BURNHAM.

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Whatever his politics,
he was preeminently a playwright

Bertolt Brecht: Anti-Hero

by BRUCE A. COOK

IN 1947 Bertolt Brecht told an interviewer that he thought he would remain in his Santa Monica home for the rest of his life. The following month he was called before the House Un-American Activities Committee, and the now-familiar question was put to him. No, said Brecht, he had never been a member of the Communist Party. "It was the best for me not to join any party whatever. . . . I found that it was not my business." Only days later he departed hurriedly on a plane to Switzerland, leaving America (and Santa Monica) for good. And just a year after that, he and his wife, Helene Weigel, arrived in East Berlin to begin work in founding their famous Berliner Ensemble, the epic theater group which soon became the brightest *Kultur* jewel in the Soviet showcase.

Until his death in 1956, Brecht left East Germany only on brief visits to a few cities in Western Europe, and to Moscow in 1955 to receive the Stalin Peace Prize. But his personal absence detracted little from his reputation in the West. In the years following his exodus to the East, both his plays and his theories of dramaturgy have received greater acceptance outside the Soviet Bloc than ever before. Conversely, Brecht's magnitude in the East has—if not diminished—dimmed just slightly, presumably because he was considered by some to be politically unreliable.

Bertolt Brecht has been labeled variously as "one of the remarkable theatrical talents we have" (by Francis Fergusson), "a poet of democracy" (by Eric Bentley), and "the paid minstrel of the G.P.U." (by Ruth Fischer, the militantly anti-Communist sister of Gerhardt and Hanns Eisler). Of these three, Fergusson's estimate seems most accurate and certainly more to the point. For whatever political postures Brecht felt it necessary to assume through his lifetime, he was a playwright by choice and conviction.

In his excellent new book, *The Theatre of Bertolt Brecht* (New Directions. $8.) John Willett complains that English critics have treated Brecht primarily as a Communist or a dramatic theoretician. Willett says, "The fact that he also writes plays was only realized here during the last few years of his life." And even then, Brecht's plays were examined for their relation to his dramatic doctrine rather than for their own worth. Willett goes to lengths to emphasize the dramatic and (in the best sense) theatrical qualities of Brecht's work. His stature can never be completely realized by studying his epic theories alone, and it may not even be grasped in a careful reading of his plays. For they, more than those of any other dramatist in this century, must be seen in production to be honestly judged. There is a great deal more to Bert Brecht's work than appears on the pages of his books.

THERE HAS been so much written on Brecht and his epic-theater theory by Eric Bentley and others that it is difficult to discuss his plays without lapsing into the jargon and literary catchwords *(Verfremdungseffekt, erzahlende Realismus,* etc.) that have come to be associated with the doctrine. But all the technical knowledge of the epic theater that we need bring with us to Brecht's plays can be stated rather briefly. The key lies in the understanding of the term *epic*. Brecht, Irwin Piscator, and the others who formulated the theory meant the word in a more exact sense than we may understand it. The term refers to the simple narration of events as in the style of the classical epic. The epic theater is opposed to the tragic, where events are shaped into a plot with a proper beginning, middle and end. Brecht never spoke of the *plot* of one of his plays, but rather of its "chain of events."

Here, epic has no connotation of the heroic as it usually has in English. Quite the contrary: most of Brecht's plays are strenuously *anti*-heroic. Mother Courage is no tragic figure, but a miserable old warmonger; and the MacHeath of Brecht's "Three-Penny Opera" is even less a hero than John Gay's MacHeath.

It follows that the epic theater's dramatic appeal is not to the emotions, but to the intellect; its object is not catharsis, but objective instruction. Brecht has striven to eliminate from his plays all the devices and qualities that might involve the spectator emotionally in the action of the play. And so you will find no suspense in, say, "Mother Courage," but rather a series of anti-climaxes. There is no orderly, scene-by-scene development of events in a play such as "Schweyk im zweiten

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Weltkrieg" but, consistent with the picaresque quality of its central figure, a number of brief episodes punctuated by didactic songs. In brief synopsis, most of Brecht's pieces seem cluttered and tedious, but in production they are seldom so. Brecht's strong humor acts as a buoy for his most serious themes. And if his plays are episodic—as most of them certainly are—their individual episodes are so tightly constructed that attention is not lost.

What he gives us is something rather close to the form of the American musical comedy. "The Three-Penny Opera" is the most familiar of Brecht's plays to American audiences; and during its long run at the Theatre de Lys in New York, many who saw it enjoyed it simply as a superior sort of musical comedy. This raises an important point in the understanding of Brecht's work for the theater. For the musical comedy more than any other dramatic form depends for its effect on the techniques of production. In the staging of the musical, such elements as costuming and set design assume a much greater importance in relation to the text than in the ordinary theater piece. And so with Brecht his text should be taken only as part of the total work, a total that may be fully realized only in the production.

TWO PROVOCATIVE articles on Brecht by Martin Esslin have appeared in recent issues of the British magazine *Encounter*. They treat Brecht's political attitude in the period following the June 17, 1953 East German uprising until his death three years later. The primary materials Esslin uses to draw his conclusions are a statement and poems published in the Brecht memorial edition of the East German literary periodical *Sinn und Form,* and an interesting poem published in a West German review and attributed to Brecht. Esslin takes them and colors them with some selected biographical data and a few astute guesses, then paints an imaginative picture of Brecht in his last years—a sort of ur-Pasternak figure, tortured with political doubts and moral anguish.

Martin Esslin's case for Brecht's disillusionment is a good one. One of the articles (in June, 1959) begins with a short piece of verse which was originally published in the West German *Deutsche Hefte*. It is said to have been written by Bertolt Brecht and privately circulated by him. Here is Esslin's translation:

The Solution

After the rising of the 17th of June
The Secretary of the Writers' Association
Had leaflets distributed in the Stalinallee
In which you could read that the People
Had lost the Government's confidence
And could only win it back
By redoubled efforts. If so, would it not
Be simpler, if the Government
Dissolved the People
And elected another?

This is certainly very like Brecht in tone. Compare it to one of his from *Sinn und Form* written at about the same time and very likely on the same theme:

The Tire Change

I sit on the edge of the street.
The driver is changing the tire.
I'm not happy with where I come from
I'm not happy with where I'm going.
Why do I watch the tire change
With such impatience?

Or to this one, also from *Sinn und Form,* which according to Esslin contains "concealed expositions of Brecht's arguments for 'sticking it out' " until "the true humanistic content of the teaching of the Marxist classics would in the last analysis reassert itself:"

Iron

In my dream last night
I saw a great storm.
It shook the scaffolding
And tore down a great beam
Made of iron.
Those parts that were of timber
Yielded and stood.

In the following poem, "Beim Lesen des Horaz," Esslin feels Brecht is saying that he fears he will never live to see the ultimate liberalization of Communism.

While Reading Horace

Even the great flood
Did not last for ever
One day the black waters
Seeped away
Yet how few
Outlasted that day!

Curiously enough, the last three poems all appear in *Sinn und Form* significantly dated 1953. They certainly indicate a state of moral discomfort—at least that. But whether they are meant to communicate more than that is a difficult question.

IN HIS FIRST article, Esslin sets out to exonerate Brecht of the onus put upon him by his statement of party loyalty following the June 17th uprising: "I feel it necessary at this moment to write to you and express my association with the S.E.D. Yours, Bertolt Brecht." This statement, contained in a letter to Walter Ulbricht, secretary of the East German Communist Party (S.E.D.), caused such consternation in West Germany that theaters all over the country joined in a general ban of his plays that lasted until after his death. "But," says Esslin, "it is now possible to state with absolute certainty that this 'message of loyalty'—which consisted of a single sentence—was in fact *the last sentence of a long and critical letter* to Ulbricht, which the latter had suppressed."

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Esslin cites as his authority for this revelation an entry in the Brecht bibliography published in the mentioned number of *Sinn und Form*. It is entered as a contribution to *Neues Deutschland,* the official organ of the S.E.D.; the last line of the item tells us that it is "the closing sentence of a letter." This upholds part of Esslin's claim for Brecht, but still there is (naturally) nothing said on the page of its being a *long* and *critical* letter, so how can it be stated "with absolute certainty"—as Esslin says it can—that that was the nature of the letter?

But even if we grant these private protests by Brecht, there were from 1953 to 1956 public protests in far more strenuous tones of his loyalty to Marxism, the East Government, and his friendship toward Russia. This, of course, constitutes a contradiction. But in his personal history there are so many similar contradictions that we may well wonder if he was ever completely serious about his political commitment.

Brecht's conversion to the cause of international Communism dates from about 1929, although he had begun studying Marxism seriously as early as 1927, finding it, as Esslin puts it, "above all an eminently 'theatrical philosophy.' " His subsequent collaboration on *Die Massnahme,* a blunt tract on party loyalty, confirmed Brecht's choice and made his loyalties unmistakable to the reactionary elements who were steadily gaining strength in the deteriorating Weimar Republic.

With the burning of the Reichstag and Hitler's seizure of power in February, 1933, Brecht fled immediately to avoid arrest. Through the next eight years he followed the precarious life of the political exile, moving from Prague to Vienna to Zurich, staying briefly in Paris, then going on to Copenhagen and Helsinki. Curiously enough, he refused to migrate to Soviet Russia, even though he had been invited to make his home there. And he realistically chose to handle his editorial duties on *Das Wort* (a German language periodical issued at the time from Moscow) by mail from Copenhagen.

When, early in 1941, Brecht did at last apply for a visa to Russia, it was to go in search of an exiled Berlin theater friend, Carola Neher, who had disappeared after speaking out against the Stalin purge trials. When he arrived in Moscow, he found all official doors closed to him, and he was advised by friends that it would be best for him to leave the country as quickly as possible. He did, traveling ten days on the trans-Siberian railroad to Vladivostok, where he and his family set out on a Swedish steamer bound for California.

Brecht and his family settled in Santa Monica where, with the help of Peter Lorre, Lion Feuchtwanger, and others of the West Coast's German colony, he bought a home and settled. Because of his extremely difficult economic position, he tried to write for American motion pictures, but with little success. His only original effort along this line in five years was the 1942 United Artists film "Hangmen Also Die."

AND YET creatively, Brecht's period of exile was an extremely fruitful one for him. Nearly all of his major pieces were written in Scandinavia and the United States. "Mother Courage," "Galileo," and the "Good Woman of Setzuan" were written while Brecht was in Denmark; "Herr Puntila und Sein Knecht Matti," while in Finland; and "The Caucasian Chalk Circle" and "Die Gesichte der Simone Machard" in America. Sixteen plays, one novel and a considerable number of short stories and poems were written by him between his departure from Germany in 1933 and his re-entry in 1948.

But throughout this period, the stage was all but closed to Brecht. Between 1933 and 1940 only one of Brecht's plays was produced professionally. After that, the situation was only slightly improved by occasional performances in Swiss theaters and the limited success of "The Private Life of the Master Race" in the United States. Through 1945 and 1946 Brecht worked with Charles Laughton on a translation of "Galileo." He put much work and even more faith into the preparation of this play for production in this country. The English version was tried out with Laughton in the title role in Los Angeles in the summer of 1947. Two months after Brecht left for Europe the play opened in New York and failed.

As soon as he arrived in Switzerland, he applied to the Allied occupation powers for a permit to enter what was to become West Germany. He had come with nine plays that he felt must be produced, and while waiting for the permit, he did manage to bring one of them, "Puntila," to the stage in Zurich. But finally a permit of another sort came—an invitation from the new East German government to come to Berlin and start a theater group for the production of Brecht's own plays and adaptations. It would mean he would be able to work again with Elizabeth Hauptmann, Gaspar Neher, and others of his old Berlin collaborators who had already re-entered East Germany. He would be able to see many of his plays produced for the first time. Brecht simply could not refuse.

And so he traveled on a Czech passport through Vienna to Prague and then up to East Berlin, avoiding the Western Zone of Germany completely. He was richly rewarded by the S.E.D. According to East German sources, his theater received "probably the greatest financial support that any playwright or director anywhere in the world has ever received." But with these resources he satisfied himself with productions of his own unstaged works and adaptations, for the most part. He did very little new writing for the theater in the last eight years of his life.

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Brecht had apparently made an irrevocable choice. When he arrived in East Germany in October, 1948, the blockade was already four months old; the lines were drawn; the Cold War had begun. Still, a number of factors can be cited which make the decision shape up as something less than final for Brecht. Before leaving for East Germany, Brecht made realistic financial preparations for a possible return to the West: he arranged for the copyright of his works to go to a West German publisher, and deposited what money he had left in a Zurich bank. He also secretly made arrangements to receive Austrian citizenship. This led to a hushed scandal in 1951 when Brecht was named for the D.D.R.'s national literary award, and it was found that he had not been a citizen of East Germany for over a year. And further, it is said that Brecht asked for and received payment for his work in East Germany in Swiss francs which were promptly deposited in his bank in Zurich; he is even said to have deposited the rubles he received for the Stalin Peace Prize in that same bank.

In spite of these practical, personal considerations, he cooperated closely with the government in political matters. In 1952 his opera "Das Verhor des Lukullus" received strong official criticism in East Germany for its clash with the party line. Brecht took the criticism more than gracefully, setting out to change the piece in accordance with the views of the government. When he had made satisfactory alterations, he claimed publicly that they constituted "an esthetic as well as political improvement."

And no matter what his misgivings may have been on the 1953 uprising, he *did* pledge support to Ulbricht. Even after the Berlin uprising he made a number of public speeches in condemnation of NATO and the rearmament of West Germany. And in 1955 he was quoted in an interview which appeared in the London *Spectator* as saying that George Orwell ought to have been exterminated.

THERE IS a temptation to shrug Brecht off as a sort of high-class opportunist. For no matter what his political loyalties he had certainly arranged his affairs to cope with any alteration in circumstance. Yet it is difficult to give in to that temptation when we consider his plays: they are his political justification; they constitute his defense against his critics in the East and in the West.

In the final scene of Brecht's "Galileo" there is a speech which has to it the ring of an apology. Andrea, Galileo's young assistant, speaks to him, seeking to justify Galileo's recantation.

> We thought with the man in the street: He will die, but he will never recant. You came back; I have recanted, but I am going to live. Your hands are dirty, we said. You said: Better dirty than void.

THE STAGE

"UN COPAIN"

THE PRESENCE among us of M. Yves Montand, the popular French singer here all too briefly at the Henry Miller, has about it something of the force of a social novelty as well as an aesthetic pleasure. I do not refer to M. Montand's politics which stand, in common knowledge, well to the left: it was he, you may recollect, who drove the truckload of ideological dynamite in the venomous Clouzot film, "The Wages of Fear." What is unique, rather, in this theatrical event of M. Montand, is the evidence of an art and a personality derived wholly from the values, the class solidarity and experience of an urban proletariat.

Every culture, the American included, has its high serious musical art, a body of expression for which the audience may be bourgeois, cultivated, fanatic or avant-garde—but inevitably, always, restricted. The counterpart to this as it were official art has latterly tended—in the Western democracies at least—to be a meretricious commodity, empty of specific feeling, brutal in its impulse of cynicism and designed with a kind of built-in obsolescence. It is a singular refinement of French culture to have preserved fastidiously a third way—the repertory and style of the *chanson,* an art form, so Mr. Virgil Thomson reminds us, as traditional as the concert song, with its own habitats, its distinguished history and prestige, and its continuing preoccupation: a portrait of contemporary life seen, as it were, from below.

M. Montand is a *chansonnier* of classical distinction. His appearance announces his allegiance: the workingman's brown shirt open lightly at the throat, the brown trousers—an image as stylized as Mlle. Edith Piaf's ineluctable black dress. M. Montand has a powerful, supple body, and the broken, humorous, lived-in face of Latin experience: everything he does is at once virile and tender. The color of his voice is a burnished chestnut, and its tone an easy resonance. When he would slide into any excess of Gallic melancholy, a streak of Italian exuberance will catch him unawares and send him kiting about the stage, to the delicious insolences of a swing band. His guise is often that of *le copain*—"a pal, one of the boys"—and his poetry is a street-corner lyricism of *les petits riens quotidiens*: the little daily nothings. He walks the boulevards, but not those of M. Chevalier, and for him, love is less an intrigue than a puzzling, necessary warmth. Unlike Mlle. Piaf, whom he otherwise complements, M. Montand does not express a concentrated glamour of pathos. He knows much about dreams, about the golden chariot that never arrives, yet his touch there is most delicately masculine: when it would seem the pain

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bears too heavily on him, cheerfulness—as it did with the failed philosopher—keeps breaking in.

The consequence of all this is a delight as impressive as it is humane and rare: sophisticated, sweet, gentle and sure. How much M. Montand's art owes to tradition and to a habit of popular life, a security of human values, will be evident; it is hardly to be had by taking thought. Yet how refreshing the *authenticity* of this personality is—its freedom within a design, as it were—and what a comment it makes on the desperate strategies of our own popular entertainers: their faces frozen in a ritual of compulsive gaiety. Skill, the knowledge of who he is, and a certainty that all men are one in *les petits riens quotidiens,* allow M. Montand to create an irresistible image of the good. *(At the Henry Miller.)* RICHARD HAYES.

THE SCREEN

THREE FACES OF ADAM

IT IS INTERESTING that three films from three different countries, all dealing with various aspects of Negro-white relationships, should turn up at once. The best of the three is the American "Take a Giant Step," which is based on the stage play by Louis S. Peterson, who wrote the screenplay with Producer Julius J. Epstein. It is told from a Negro's point of view, that of teen-age Spencer Scott who lives with his middle-class Negro parents and grandmother in a Northern city where racial tensions have never been pronounced. Adolescence is no easy period, but it is especially hard for Spence, who rows with his teacher, with his parents, and with his white pals, who still want him on their ball team but no longer include him in their parties with girls. Only Spence's aged, outspoken grandma seems to understand the restless boy.

Actually "Take a Giant Step" is a character sketch of a boy's growth to maturity, and like "Tea and Sympathy" considers a sexual experience as part of the growth. Spence meets up with a prostitute, runs away from her in abhorrence after paying her, but later the unhappy and lonely boy persuades the Scotts' sympathetic housemaid to come to his room. More important than this ill-considered first sex, however, is Spence's loving and healthy relationship with Grandma, who gives the boy some sense of dignity.

Under Philip Leacock's sensitive direction, "Take a Giant Step" is a moving and often disturbing film. Heading the good cast are Johnny Nash as the confused boy who hates being black, Ruby Lee as the housemaid who assures him he's going to be black a long time and he might as well get used to it, Estelle Hemsley as Gram whose caustic remarks don't soothe Spence's ambitious parents but whose heart-warming talks with Spence do help the boy know and accept himself. When he realizes that his white pals are "friends up to a point," that he can be an individual with or without them, he has taken the giant step.

FROM ENGLAND has come "Sapphire," which starts out like any other whodunit with the body of a murdered girl being found in London and two detectives (Nigel Patrick and Michael Craig) being assigned to the case. But it soon becomes no ordinary movie when the dead girl's doctor-brother arrives to identify the body. He is a Negro, and it turns out that Sapphire herself was a mulatto who passed as white. The complicated screenplay by Janet Green is loaded with clues. As a crime-and-detection picture, "Sapphire" is extremely well done, and Michael Relph has given it an excellent production, with stunning color photography and a fine large cast directed by Basil Dearden. As a mystery-thriller, however, it is only mildly exciting, and its solution seems rather tame.

The film's chief dramatic values are in its Negro-white situations, which are greatly aided by the frank dialogue and well-played characterizations. Director Dearden's cast includes Paul Massie as a student who wanted to marry Sapphire, Bernard Miles as his father, Yvonne Mitchell as his sister, Earl Cameron as Sapphire's thoughtful brother, Gordon Heath as an African lawyer, Harry Baird as a former suitor who flees from the police only to be beaten up by London's white juvenile delinquents known as Teddy Boys. "Sapphire" may not win any prizes, but it deserves a hand for its stand against intolerance.

A FRENCH contribution to Negro-white relationships is "Tamango," a melodrama stemming from a story by Prosper Mérimée about the revolt of a shipload of African slaves in the early 1800's. While much of this picture is interesting, thanks particularly to the stirring and unaffected performance of Negro Alex Cressan in his first movie, most of it goes so far out of its way to be sensational that it loses effect. Director John Berry misses no opportunity to stress the unsavory affair between the slave-trading captain of the ship and the beautiful native girl who becomes his mistress. Curt Jurgens and Dorothy Dandridge make the most of these flamboyant roles, but they are not helped much by the English dialogue which sounds as if it was dubbed in.

At times the film's seascapes in Technicolor and CinemaScope are quite handsome, but it is Cressan as Tamango, the warrior and leader of the revolt, whose bravery wins most attention. "Tamango" is no great shakes as a movie, but it is an effective reminder of a period which saw the origins of many of today's woes.

PHILIP T. HARTUNG.

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BUDAPEST

New York, December 1956

Dust in the fog dropped opal and down the East River
Night setting fire to the bridges would drown what we knew:
Out over the halls ringing eloquence taller grew the horror:
Budapest, from every empty chair, stared warning what dreams can do.

The bridges, all, burning before us; the world crossed on embers.
O the gay wines could they now hush the jackboots of Time?
We walked in the light of the stars spinning to death. December
Flung in the face of each dream every dawn a new crime.

But that day would die like a moth in flame, blind to its terror.
How else, when to think with the blood leaves other ways vain?
Heart, heart, none so darkened would follow the darkener forever.
High deeds downthunder like hoofs when fire sweeps a plain.

*

New York, from a height, hell-bright . . . O why my elation
When it seemed there Nineveh smouldering and nothing could last?
Golden cities had been buried before, with an angry discussion.
I saw them stand tall in the eyes as you talked of kings of the past.

And recalled a lost village when the pinetree-lights dotted Park Avenue;
O Child, born in squalor, be born where the torn streets burn!
And here, cast away the ancient streets that new glitter
Watching the play of the death-games no century's love learned.

Egypt flaring, and in Syria, Sennacherib rising in the shadows;
On the islands Antigone, on trial, sentenced each noon.
The witches with us in a double sense ever paltering
As in Hungary the stone rolled to, sealing the tomb.

And slowly as December smoked up between the rivers
The ghost of Robespierre shuffled across the skies.
It twisted the treaties like the last planeleaves, scraps for no ragpicker.
It turned the dream to a nightmare of blood and flies.
It tore the flag of the Magyar, made a rag of the heavens,
But the woods were moving. Tomorrow, Dunsinane.
Though Time like the Curtain sever Today from Tomorrow,
O that strange face in the ruins, the soul, was peering through the flames.

And walking through the galleries by Central Park, looking for a picture,
I thought of far places still left us—Corot's spring elm,
How Goya had painted despair at a like cruel hour.
I thought of the only palace no troop could storm.

Thought of those who changed the wine of their dreams to lifeblood
Following forever a way that was huge and high,
Draining the cup, as this hour's patriot,
Pearse and Petofi walked forth to die.

And if jackboots trampled, trembling each meadow an Aetna
Deadening the cry of the dying rebel, and our shame,
If the leaves, all, were twisted, still, among the branches
The bleeding trees held high the night, in all its pain.

Because Lose is Save, however the day nail the dream,
O slaughtered Lamb, loved land as the Lamb outpoured,
No belows glittered hell as from a height this moment seemed,
Though the legions bear weapons not dreamt of before.

But taking madness, the ant with care confounding the cobra,
The terrible prayer of the saint singing fair the dark night,
The rebel's hand tearing at tanks—so kindled by that fury
Dawn, drive that unholy ghost from sight!

Sword dangling over the dream, quicken the dreamer!
Siberian winds, cut bleeding the steppes of our sleep.
Let that night of pain change our wines to lifeblood!
Budapest, since that first Easter we know no defeat.

*

O what captured Corot's trembling elm but the fair day's impermanence.
But they sang, on the way to a Bastille, with their full breath.
What charges the dawn with high deed but tragedy's imminence.
Heart, wise with life, these foolish deaths shall fool death!

CLAIRE MCCALLISTER.

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Marcel Proust and the Dragon of Time

PROUST: The Early Years. By George D. Painter. Atlantic - Little, Brown. $6.50.

By RICHARD GILMAN

IT WOULD seem to take a high degree of courage and fixity of ambition to write another biography of Proust, unless it takes instead a willful blindness and advanced level of monomania. For Proust, after all, threw confusion into our theories about the relationship of a writer to his work, lengthened rather than shortened the distance from experience to its rebirth in literature, and undermined the biographer's indispensable method of procedure —by chronology.

Yet biographers, who are surrogate artists to an extent that even critics are not, are stimulated rather than depressed by Proust's having opened our eyes to the unavailingness of ordinary means of apprehending the lives of others, and they continue to settle upon him like tourists on San Marco, but with the advantage that they think they possess a Baedeker prepared by the cathedral itself. This confidence is doubtless what we mistake for their blind courage, just as they mistake *Remembrance of Things Past* for an autobiography.

There is a more subtle source of error in undertaking a life of Proust: a too exclusive faith in the equation, "art equals life tightened by form," in which case the step from the novel to its author, however intricate the movements necessary to take it, is still only a step.

George Painter is a biographer of the second kind, with the distinguishing feature that he seems to draw his superabundant energy and sense of purpose from the state of war that exists between himself and those "closed system" Proustians—critics and readers for whom the novel is autonomous, a splendid and lordly cosmos, whom he denounces as fanatics and charges with the responsibility for Proust's never having been adequately explored.

Fanaticism? Perhaps, but what else is this statement of Painter's: ". . . there is no aspect of Proust or his work—his style, philosophy, character, morality, his attitude to music, painting, Ruskin, snobism and so on—which can be studied without an accurate and detailed knowledge of his life. . . ."

Well, the things that matter most have in fact been fruitfully studied within the strict borders of the work (Samuel Beckett, whose *Proust* is still the finest piece of writing on *Remembrance* that I have seen, savagely announces his exclusion of any reference to the "fabulous invalid," the salon-fly and even the author of the stories and essays), and Mr. Painter, for all his magisterial tone, is simply unable to persuade us that his kind of zealotry is better.

Still, it is useful, if you don't expect to be in possession of the secret of Proust's art and if you happen to be interested in the superficies of a writer's existence, in everything, that is, which is subtly and finally *not* his art.

"I have endeavored to write a definitive biography of Proust," Painter begins, and if we make allowances for the excessiveness of the claim, he has pretty well succeeded.

With incredible patience and resourcefulness he has tracked down every relevant fact it is possible to unearth about Proust's life, every relationship, every illness, journey, dinner-party, all his attitudes toward the questions of the day, the sources of his technical knowledge, his shifts in intellectual loyalty, the phases of his advancing knowledge of himself, the components of his neurosis, the fluctuations of his position in the eyes of others.

From all this a few new, or newly illuminated, truths emerge: that Proust genuinely tried to combat his homosexuality and that he did experience love for women, that he was never idle for long periods but wrote constantly, that far from being impenetrable by the sufferings of others he could be moved to tears by the recital of an injustice, however trivial.

But Painter's main concern is with the relationship of the life to the novel—my strictures were not intended to give a contrary impression—so that he is most interested in discovering the genesis of *Remembrance of Things Past* in Proust's actual experience. In one direction he pursues the development of Proust's growing insight into the nature of involuntary memory, the keystone of the entire edifice, and in another he succeeds in identifying, to his own satisfaction at least—and there seems no reason to quarrel with him—the originals of almost all of Proust's characters, while making the important point that they are invariably composite figures.

They are all here — Swann, Odette, the Duc and Duchesse de Guermantes, Charlus, Saint-Loup, Madame Verdurin, Cottard, Legrandin, Bergotte, Vinteuil, Elstir, even Morel, Jupien, Ski, Norpois, Madame Villeparisis and other lesser figures; and what is most exciting, if you are excited by such things, Albertine herself, in the person of one Marie Finlay, the sister of a schoolfellow of Proust.

The point is, what are we to do with them? Mr. Painter tells us that he intends to examine later the creative use to which Proust put these inhabitants of his life—this is the first of two volumes, taking Proust up to the point of beginning his masterwork—and also that he expects to say the definitive word about the latter, as well as something significant about the nature of the literary process itself.

But can he deliver? To know that Swann, for instance, is based on Charles Haas, Emile Straus and Charles Ephrussi, and to contemplate the selections Proust made from these models, the realignments, compressions, superimpositions and graftings, is to place us very little nearer the mysterious reality of Swann. It is of the essence

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of Proust's art that his characters are truly inexplicable, that they are stated, given, preserved from explanation by the destruction at the hands of their creator of what falsifies every *real* life: the distorting action of Time.

Mr. Painter has really done nothing else than re-introduce time, the dragon Proust slew, by asserting the rights of "reality."

The Sleep-Waker

MALCOLM. By James Purdy. Farrar, Straus and Cudahy. $3.95.

By THOMAS F. CURLEY

THE MORE I read of Mr. Purdy the less I understand. That he has a strong talent, even a genius, I have no doubt; but that genius is at once so assured technically and so "crazy" in its intuition that I wonder if he will ever come to grips with the familiar, the vulgar, the everyday.

The short-long life of Malcolm (he has no last name) is the subject of Mr. Purdy's first full length novel. Malcolm is a fifteen-year-old boy whose father has disappeared and who has nothing else to do but sit on a bench by a palatial hotel and wait for the father's return. One day he is persuaded by Mr. Cox, a well-known astrologer, to leave the bench and make his own way in life. To help him on his way Mr. Cox supplies him with a number of addresses of people who may ease his entry into the world. The bulk of the book is devoted to an account of Malcolm's calls on these people.

He meets Estel Blanc, the undertaker, who is not charmed by Malcolm and sends him on his way with the advice that he come back in twenty years; he also meets Kermit, the midget painter who won't admit to his midgetry; and Madame Girard who is only and always Madame Girard, refusing to relinquish her title, as she calls it, even after her husband, Girard Girard, marries another woman for purposes of procreation; the last of his calling cards leads him to Eloisa O.K. Brace, also a painter, and her husband Jerome, an ex-con. The Braces run some kind of hostel for jazz musicians but of course they put Malcolm up for several nights even though they don't have bed room.

Malcolm, however, does not enter fully into life until, having exhausted Mr. Cox's list of addresses, he comes across, on his own, one of the contemporaries, a motorcyclist in a leather jacket, who introduces him to another contemporary, name of Melba, a famous chanteuse, who immediately proposes to Malcolm. He accepts. They are married.

"Too young for the army, too unprepared to continue his schooling and become a scientist, too untrained for ordinary work—what was left for him but marriage? And in his case, marriage supplied him with everything that he had up to now lacked, and also gave him his unique way of leaving the world, in which he had perhaps never belonged (as some people said) in the first place.

Marriage which ushers most people into life, in Malcolm's case, therefore, ushered him into happiness—and death."

The physician who diagnosed him just before his death was of the opinion that he suffered from acute alcoholism and sexual hyperaesthesia. After his death (Melba having departed with her Cuban valet) Malcolm was treated to an elaborate private funeral by his old friend and persistent admirer, Madame Girard. The only flaw in the ceremony was that both the coroner and the undertaker insisted that there had been no corpse and consequently no burial.

And that's *that*. And *that* leaves many unanswered questions. I do know that Malcolm never really gave up looking for his father. Indeed, at one point, he had his head split open for his curiosity. He never did find him, never even got much sympathy. "Who wants a father?" Melba says to him. "Its been old hat for years." Melba being a contemporary will have no truck with time. It seems proper, however, that Malcolm's demise, like his father's, should be described as a disappearance rather than a death. Death is too definite, too earthy.

Which brings me back to Purdy and environs. Not knowing what he's getting at doesn't bother me—one can not always expect immediate clarity from a genuine artist—but I am lost as to where he is. Both in *63 Dream Palace,* his earlier short novel, and in *Malcolm,* Purdy immediately and with aplomb leads the reader—nowhere. This utopia is unearthy; Purdy's humanity is all of a piece primarily because all of his people possess that internal consistency which is proper to gods and beasts, but not to men.

What strikes me as odd is that sensation of moving in, or watching, a dream, but a dream that is controlled by a conscious and ever vigilant dream master, Mr. Purdy himself. It was Poe who used the term "sleep-waker," and though at first encounter they are worlds apart there is somewhat of the mathematician of dreams in Purdy as there is in Poe.

I do not know what Mr. Purdy means, but when an artist is so evidently accomplished it is well for critics to be patient. It may be that Purdy will never come to terms with the familiar, the vulgar, the everyday; he may, however, provide us with an image of what it is like to be without such experiences.

Burden of Life

THE RACK. By A. E. Ellis. Atlantic-Little, Brown. $4.50.

By MAX COSMAN

A. E. ELLIS is a pseudonym for someone who is so set on privacy that even his publishers are in no position to be personal about him. Such little as one may gather is that he is an Englishman, that this is his first novel, and that he has a very immediate knowledge of life in a T.B. sanatorium.

What we have on his literary antecedents is also limited. Obviously he is indebted to Thomas Mann, who preceded him in the art of making literature out of tubercular

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travail. Not so obviously, unless we take a hint from *The Rack,* he owes something to four other stellar figures of fiction: Proust, whose world of "dining by candlelight *chez la Princesse de Noailles*" is a foil to one of fever and disintegration; Dostoyevsky and Chekov, who illustrate the agonies of underground men, "dreary, eternal students" especially; and Stendhal, who when given the chance can teach a beginner to write matter-of-factly.

Neither his use of things learned nor his native integrity of presentation constitutes a claim for Mr. Ellis as the fifth member of a great quintet. He is not that; he lacks the scope, the profundity, the essential health of the others. But he does have something to offer and it is this: an honest depiction of a man besieged by fate until he submits to it hopelessly—the theme, of course, which Sartre and Camus exploited so much in former years.

That things do not come out right ("life is not a novel in which things somehow contrive to come all right in the end") is the burden, then, of *The Rack.* The elaborate case in point is Paul Davenant's. After two and a half years of torturous manipulations — pneumothorax, sternal puncture, inter-pleural injections and aspirations, latterly a weekly *lavage* of creosote—he is told by an indubitable specialist that nothing has availed. Doomed before treatment began, he is no less doomed now, and so much of life as remains to him is subject to even more drastic medical procedures than he has had.

Defeat for the major character of the novel; defeat for minor ones too. Dr. Bruneau, self-seeker despite his being a philosopher, falls ill just when he achieves his dearest wish—appointment as *Médecin Chef.* Nor is destiny softer to the deserving—Dubois, for example. The classic good doctor, he is capable, interested in his patients, charitable enough to pay the bills of those who are too helpless to do so themselves. Yet suddenly he dies of a heart attack, poor, his position contested for before he is in his grave.

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Surprisingly enough, however, sanatorium life is not unrelievedly grim. Call it condemned men's dispensation or not, celebration of holidays are usually in order. Even high jinks are not uncommon. During a mass screening of patients, for instance, someone is bound to enter an X-ray cabinet with a fork or some other piece of metal across his chest to the consternation of the examining physician who distinguishes an object apparently within the lobe of the person examined.

For that matter, when Mr. Ellis qua Ellis lets go a bit, his ironic view of human motivation is apt to be humorous. Consider the interrogation of M. Halfont on the diet he furnishes patients. His defense of chiseling in terms of honor and the plight of his country would have intrigued an Anatole France himself.

But the final pages of the novel make no concession to comfort. A cure impossible, love lost, his attempt at suicide frustrated, unsustained by the philosophy of an Epictetus or the intellection of a Bertrand Russell or even some consoling faith available to the commonest of his fellowmen, Paul is indeed on a rack beyond bearing. A last glimpse discovers him staring across at a half-open window.

It is for such considerations, steeped as they are in suggestions of our collective pathos, that *The Rack,* late shoot though it is and in an alien soil, justifies the existential tree it comes from.

Of Good and Evil

THE PYX. By John Buell. Farrar, Straus & Cudahy. $3.50.

By PATRICIA DONEGAN

ACCORDING to the dust jacket blurb, John Buell's *The Pyx* is a study of evil with a sub-strata which contains a like study of goodness. Undoubtedly this was the author's purpose.

The story concerns the attitudes, relationships and emotions of Elizabeth Lucy, prostitute and member of a big-time vice ring. Elizabeth emerges as a calm young woman, certainly tinged with sadness, but although afraid of the future she must face, accepting it. Her feeling doesn't seek to release itself in the usual human ways—there is no hate, no violence, not even confusion. She is passive, and even her passivity is not made very convincing. She has been instrumental in rescuing a young girl from drug addiction and prostitution, and she visits her during a time when the girl is going through withdrawal symptoms in the arms of a doctor nun. The possibilities for conflict in this scene are tremendous, but the author fails to utilize them.

In effect, Mr. Buell, while aware that evil contains, in its complexities, the seeds of goodness, as must all human concepts, seems aware of it from a distance. His perception is an intellectual one, and he treats the two subjects separately, with a tidiness inconsistent with the intertangling of human motives. The story line moves along well, but the summation of "good" qualities in "bad" characters smacks of the sentimental, and the whole struggle seems unreal.

Certainly the tragedy of evil is the submersion of goodness or the drowning of love. The struggle within the character is a violent one and can never, perhaps, be "told about" but must be shown as it wages within. Flannery O'Connor does this with consummate skill in "The Misfit"; Nathaniel West does the same thing in *The Day of the Locust.* Mr. Buell fails to do it.

Prosy Novel

THE RIPENING. By Edouard Glissant. Translated by Frances Frenaye. Braziller. $3.75.

By WILLIAM DUNLEA

IT MAY be news to most of us that in Martinique the people are on the march; it is old stuff to Edouard Glissant, who is at some pains to update us on the national

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awakening in which he participated as a youth, and which was well under way fifteen years ago, the time of his story. Of late years M. Glissant has been living in France, where he is known for his poetry; this, his first novel, won the Prix Renaudot last year. Its French title, *La Légarde,* the name of a Martinique river, is suggestive of its overreliance on descriptive presentation.

The prosiest novels are frequently written by poets who fashion symbols instead of characters. Through its own derelictions, M. Glissant's novel rejuvenates some of the most shopworn strictures on prose fiction. Characters are people but symbols will be symbols, and so here we have a plot that never becomes a story. The various episodes are designed to parallel in minute detail as many national legends. The result is a mythopoeic saga of surrogate heroes, and a toilsome narrative that drops into momentous hiatuses what it cannot cram into diffuse imagery or sift through turgid symbolism.

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The plot centers on the conspiracy of a small circle of young political reformers to assassinate a native official of the local branch of the colonial administration whom they regard as a traitor; once he is out of the way free elections can be held (though no mention is made of purges). The intellectual leader of the rebels is Mathieu, but it is Thael, a mountaineer who is even too young to vote, who is chosen for the act.

These proceedings are implied to be at least an approximation of recent history, yet they are less real than pure fiction. It is never clear, for instance, why Garin is singled out as a traitor to the cause of the people, practiced though he apparently is at grinding down the faces of the poor; nor why he presents the most formidable obstacle to reform, especially since he turns out to be so unresistant as to acquiesce in his own murder; and the political activities of the rebels are at best sketchy.

But the author is not to be taken up on these puzzlers: he has enveloped all—most ludicrously the love affair—in a leaden aura of the "inevitable"—a familiar dodge when hard talent and cold knowledge are lacking to the writer.

Joyce and Co.

SHAKESPEARE AND COMPANY. By Sylvia Beach. Harcourt Brace. $4.50.

By MICHAEL HARRINGTON

SHAKESPEARE AND COMPANY is a delightful piece of literary gossip. The theme of James Joyce and his fear of dogs, for instance, is given much more space than the occupation of Paris by the Nazis. But then Sylvia Beach's purpose is not analysis or social history but rather reminiscence about the fascinating figures who thronged her Paris bookshop in the twenties. The value of her book resides in providing a human and anecdotal insight into writers who are now huge as legends.

The central figure is, of course,

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Joyce. It was Shakespeare and Company which published *Ulysses* in the days when it had to be smuggled into the United States; it was Shakespeare and Company which often enough made it possible for Joyce to live. In Sylvia Beach's pages, Joyce emerges as an appealing figure, but with the unconscious arrogance of genius. The image of the great Irish writer terrified by a friendly dog is a needed contrast to the mythic picture one develops of the author of *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*.

Most of the other important literary figures of the twenties are here too: Hemingway (in Miss Beach's mind, a gentler personality than we usually think), Scott Fitzgerald who, with Zelda, simply leaves money in a bowl in the hall so that the tradesmen can collect their bills, André Gide at the beach and not quite the *homme de lettres*, and on and on. An occasional old feud or disappointment flits across the pages—Shakespeare and Company was one center, Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas another—but for the most part the tone is steeped in the natural affection of memory.

There is, however, one puzzle which Shakespeare and Company suggests. How is it that so many talented people should have formed a circle before they were recognized? I ask the question whimsically, yet it bothers me. Why did the figure at the door almost always turn out to be Allen Tate or Sherwood Anderson? Where, during all of this, was someone whose name was forgotten, whose poetry was bad, and who now thinks back from Cedar Rapids with an occasional smile to the hectic, hopeful days in Paris? One could not seriously expect such a character to appear in a book like this—it is hardly the point of such a reminiscence—yet I wonder about him. And, on a somewhat more serious level, there is the fact that in the twenties, both in New York and Paris, a sort of fraternity of unrecognized but genuine talent existed.

But then, the twenties were different, and that is what confers a tangential importance on Sylvia Beach's book. This was the time of the explosion of the modern novel—*Ulysses*, the *Remembrance of Things Past* and *The Magic Mountain* were published within a few years of each other. The postwar sense of possibility, political as well as artistic, the spirit of 1919, was apparently a very real factor. It created an atmosphere in which talent and innovation could breathe. Part of that breathing occurred at Shakespeare and Company and the memory is well worth the while.

In short, if you are not seeking deep analysis and complex relationships, but a sort of delightful memory book of some of the more interesting writers of our time, *Shakespeare and Company* is an excellent choice, the photographs are fine, too.

The Critical Habit

A REVIEWER'S ABC. By Conrad Aiken. Meridian. $5.

By ALICE ELLEN MAYHEW

THIS BOOK is a collection of criticism, of essays about criticism, critical essays on the nature of poetry and critiques of numerous literary works—mostly contemporary and mainly poetry. Practically

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all of this material appeared originally in periodicals, covering the years from 1916 to the present (the last review actually appeared in 1951), and does not represent a survey of modern literature nor even of the mainstreams of literary endeavor. It is simply those excerpts that the poet-critic Conrad Aiken wishes to preserve of the work he has done in those forty-odd years. It forms a sort of ideograph of Aiken. "They represent my own particular attempt to urge the poetic concepts of the day in a direction that might be favorable to me."

The first part of the book is devoted to expositions of the nature of criticism, the creative process and the place and function of the created work in society. Therefore, even though it is true that a book of collected criticisms primarily gives a splendid view of the reviewer, we have already had Mr. Aiken's own stated propositions on the problems of literature and esthetics against which we can hold his critical treatment of other authors.

On the primary question of esthetics, the nature of the poetic intuition, Mr. Aiken is more explicit as to what it is *not*. Art or poetry is defined, through secondary causes, as the result of the poet's very individual sensibility, and Mr. Aiken has something to say about the way that sensibility works and how the poet feels, but the question of what constitutes the essence of the act of art or the poetic impulse remains, in this collection at least, unanswered.

There is a strong influence of Freud and behaviorist psychology in Mr. Aiken's early writing, but the author's attitudes, when one comes down to them, are modified by his own sensibleness and sensitivity. At first glance, the book seems to be filled with contradictions and the writing terribly uneven, but then we realize that the essays are grouped by subject matter in spite of when they were written. Placed chronologically, they represent a more pleasing facade of evolution and precision. Mr. Aiken mellows toward the intellectual aspects of creativity. Thus, in 1922, the poet is one in whom the process of daydreaming is intrinsically connected with the behaviorist notion of the "language habit," one who has splendid motor-linguistic reflexes; in 1931, he adds to this notion that the good poet "must have not merely the clearest and subtlest of sensibilities; he must have also the boldest and subtlest of minds. The poet who is a mere drifting sensorium in a world of sense is of no more use to us than the most word-chopping of logicians."

The rather black-and-white earlier view of poetry, typified by the title of a 1919 essay—"Magic or Legerdemain?" is gradually modified, although there are some points which still seem vague. The notion that there is a wildness about

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The articles on Literature and Theology, the American novel and Bertolt Brecht in this Fall Book Number are typical of Commonweal literary issues. They also serve as good examples of the sort of literary comment that appears in the magazine throughout the year in regular issues.

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poetry occurs both in 1919 and 1940. However, at one point, Mr. Aiken holds that those things in the poem which "have the greatest magic and beauty are usually not the product of skill" (1919); and, at another, that poetic "implication" is always a virtue, for it "shimmers, it suggests, it gives the desired strangeness" (1923). But valid implication must, of course, be precise and is not accidental.

Actually, Mr. Aiken's ideas seem to progress from the notion that all poetic impulse comes from without to a realization that it comes from both the senses' perceptions and the mind's contemplation. This is a less behaviorist notion of poetry. In 1927, Aiken confirms this later view by stating that Keats's skepticism was not expressed in his poetry *as a concept* because "he had not reached, before he died, a point at which he could compel his genius (or whatever) . . . to express his whole mind, doubts and all."

During the twenties and early thirties, when so many American critics were fighting for literature that would concern itself with the large questions of politics and society and were aghast at the peculiarly American gap between the concerns of the intellectual and the pursuits of the people, Aiken reemphasized the acutely personal quality of art. Certain artists were being ignored because their writing contained no social dogma and he commented, caustically, "Melville, Poe, Emily Dickinson and Henry Adams can go hang themselves, and Henry James can go to England."

Along with the movement toward propagandist literature in the twenties, came the wail of contemporary criticism that poetry could find no proper and important ideal to cling to. Eliot and Pound were victims of that dilemma; Pound avoided the issue but Eliot made a poetic use of the very predicament. Eventually Eliot found a position (which he described in his famous remark: "classicist in literature, royalist in politics, and Anglo-Catholic in religion") that Aiken and Edmund Wilson and many other critics found absurd. He had been one of the world's explorers and, Aiken commented with cuteness, "but for the Grace of God, he might be yet." It was a reaction to be expected from the early essays of psychological behaviorism and skepticism. This view had earlier led Aiken to an interpretation of Dostoevsky which found his "timelessness" and "mystic terror" and fierce religious humanitarianism to be products of his epilepsy.

There are startling lapses of taste in Mr. Aiken's prose style, but he is at his best in commenting specifically on the works of other writers; just for example: the consequent weakness of Eliot's use of allusions which have intellectual and emotional validity for him and not for us; the cryptic symbolism of Emily Dickinson; the lack of psychological insight in Galsworthy; Faulkner's use of the language; Lawrence's obsessions, and innumerable others.

This is a provocative book, for everyone who is interested in American literary criticism.

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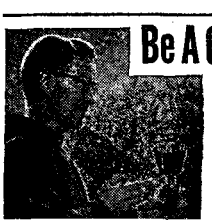

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